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Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development
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Outcomes of regional preparatory meetings

Arab Declaration to the World Summit on Sustainable Development

The Arab Ministers responsible for development affairs, planning, and environment, meeting at the headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 24 October 2001, corresponding to 8 Sha`ban 1422 a.h., to prepare an Arab statement for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 2 to 11 September 2002,

Recalling the relevant declarations, and in particular the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972); the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992); the Declaration of Barbados, adopted at the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (Bridgetown, 1994); the Arab Declaration on Environment and Development (Tunis, 1986); the Arab Declaration on Environment and Development and Future Perspectives (Cairo, 1991); the Malmö Ministerial Declaration, adopted by the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (2000); the Jeddah Declaration, adopted at the first World Forum on the Environment from an Islamic Perspective (2000); the Tehran Declaration on Environment, Religion and Culture (2001); the Abu Dhabi Declaration on the Future of Environmental Action in the Arab World (2001); and the Rabat Declaration, on investment opportunities in sustainable development in drylands (2001); and also the adoption of the Jeddah Declaration by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (Doha, November 2000); the endorsement of the Abu Dhabi Declaration by the Arab Summit Conference (Amman, March 2001); and the charging of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment with the completion of the Arab preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development,

Having studied together the report entitled "The future of environmental action in the Arab world" (2001); the reports on global environmental perspectives (GEO reports) (2000); the report of the Arab Region Eminent Persons Thematic

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Roundtable on sustainable development (Beirut, 2001); the report of the African Roundtable of Eminent Persons (Cairo, 2001); the report of the Regional Stakeholders Roundtable in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Bahrain, 2001); the findings and recommendations of the Arab forum on civil society (2001) and forums of industrialists (2001) and Arab parliamentarians (2001); and the Arab report on sustainable development, prepared by the Joint Secretariat (2001),

Renewing the commitment to working together, within a context of responsibility that is shared yet differs between the advanced countries and the developing countries, to achieve sustainable development,

Looking forward to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which will include a review and assessment of the implementation of Agenda 21 over the past ten years and will offer the international community another opportunity to establish concrete, implementable programmes aimed at achieving sustainable development through the adoption of the necessary measures for the fulfilment of States' commitments and pledges and the strengthening of international cooperation for taking up the challenges facing the countries of the world, especially developing countries,

Noting that, owing to the desire for effective participation in the World Summit on Sustainable Development, cooperation at the Arab level has taken place between the League of Arab States, represented by Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, and both the United Nations Environment Programme and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in cooperation with the relevant Arab, regional and international organizations, on the organization of regional forums for stakeholders in sustainable development, involving a review of the progress made in various fields in the implementation of Agenda 21, the listing of obstacles and challenges, the outlining of strategies, the defining of goals and priorities for joint action and the presentation of the Arab vision of the general framework of international cooperation and the machinery for achieving it,

Emphasizing that many achievements have been realized in the Arab region in the field of sustainable development, covering economic, social and environmental aspects; that those achievements, whose effects have been clearly visible in the lives of the region's inhabitants in the areas of health, education and economy, include an increase in per capita income; a higher level of community and health services; a lower illiteracy rate; a higher percentage of women in education and greater work opportunities for women; a relative decline in population growth and an increase in the average age of the population; the creation and development of environmental and development institutions; the enactment and development of legislation; capacity-building; effective participation in the implementation of regional and international conventions; enhanced regional cooperation in various domains, especially that of the Arab Free Trade Zone; the implementation, among a number of Arab countries, of projects on transport, electrical grid interconnection and natural gas; and the strengthening of the Arab ministerial councils on regional cooperation in the fields of development, economy, planning, agriculture, environment, health, information and services; and that the Arab region has witnessed promising efforts towards rationalizing the consumption of natural resources and an increasing role of the private sector, civil society and grass-roots participation,

Aware of the fact that, despite the positive results achieved, the efforts to bring about sustainable development in the Arab world are fraught with numerous obstacles, some of which have effects that are carried forward for many years, the most important being the following:

Instability in the region, resulting from the absence of peace and security and the inability of the international community to deal with the issue of Palestine and the occupied Arab territories on a basis of justice and within the framework of the relevant international resolutions;

The problem of poverty in some of the Arab countries, which is aggravated by illiteracy, population growth, unemployment, accumulated loans and the related interest and irrational exploitation of natural resources;

The continual population increase in Arab cities and towns, continued rural-urban migration, the spread of squatter settlements, the aggravation of pressures on ecosystems and on community services and utilities, air pollution and waste accumulation;

The fact that the Arab region is characterized in general by harsh climatic conditions, in particular low average rainfall as compared with the overall yearly average, higher summer temperatures and high evaporation and transpiration rates, all of which tend to produce repeated drought and increased desertification;

The limited nature and poor utilization of natural resources, including an acute shortage of water resources, water pollution, scarcity of land suitable for use in the various agricultural activities, soil degradation and an absence of non-renewable energy in some parts of the Arab world;

The weak capacities of some Arab educational and research institutions and the fact that they lag behind with respect to global scientific and technical advances, especially in terms of providing the requisites for sustainable development in the Arab world;

The fact that civil society is young in terms of experience and has not effectively participated in the formulation and implementation of sustainable development strategies and programmes;

The unsuitableness of some of the technology and expertise imported from the advanced countries for economic, social and environmental conditions in the Arab world, and the shortage of skilled national staff capable of working with that technology;

The economic embargo imposed on some Arab countries,

Cognizant of the fact that there exist many challenges as well as opportunities for overcoming difficulties, achieving sustainable development and preserving the environment in the Arab world, some of the most important of which relate to:

1. Poverty, which poses a fundamental challenge to sustainable development in the Arab world, requiring rational utilization of available resources, the creation of a suitable climate for investment both locally and regionally, the establishment of a mechanism of social solidarity at the national level, the achievement of integration among Arab States in various areas and the granting

of priority to Arab labour to help curb unemployment and the spread of poverty;

2. The steady rise in population in the Arab region in relation to available natural resources and the absence of sound human resources planning;

3. The high youth population ratio characteristic of Arab society, which, albeit a positive indicator in terms of human resources, also poses the major challenge of creating a favourable environment for education and training and suitable work opportunities;

4. Ever-increasing migration from rural to urban areas, which implies that rural areas must be accorded priority in the preparation of health, education and development programmes and attention must be paid to the creation of infrastructures and service facilities to meet the needs of Arabs living in rural areas and to halt migration to the cities;

5. Irrational use of natural resources, especially water, land and energy, which implies the need for consciousness-raising and sound management of such resources, the encouragement of sustainable production and consumption patterns and cooperation and integration among Arab countries with a view to conserving those resources and exploiting them in such a way as to bring about sustainable development;

6. Globalization and its consequences, which may limit the possibility of achieving sustainable development in the Arab region, and the need to set up the Arab region in line with its own economic and institutional conditions and create a strong Arab regional bloc based on the region's cultural, civilizational and economic constituents;

7. The creation of a strong Arabic economic entity, which means strengthening the components of the Arab common market, striving to integrate it so as to offer a large market for Arab products and strengthening the negotiating position of the Arab States with other regional associations and economic blocs, including the World Trade Organization;

8. The transfer, adaptation and mastery of modern technologies in a manner suited to economic, social and environmental conditions in the Arab States; the study of those technologies selected for import and the assessment of their applications and their possible effects; and the remedying of any drawbacks inherent in them before they begin to be applied in the region;

9. Maintenance of the cultural and religious heritage that is unique to the Arab region and its utilization to achieve sustainable development,

Declare the following:

First: Achieving sustainable development in the Arab world requires the establishment of an integrated, common Arab strategy for improving the economic, social, health and living conditions of the Arab population and preserving the environment in the Arab region that takes into account historical and present conditions in the region and anticipated future changes and world developments with a view to realizing the following objectives:

1. The achievement of peace and security on a just basis and the elimination of foci of tension and weapons of mass destruction, foremost among them nuclear weapons, from the Middle East region;

2. The curbing of poverty and unemployment;

3. The achievement of harmony between population growth rates and available natural resources;

4. The elimination of illiteracy and the development of educational methods and curricula and scientific and technical education and research to meet the needs of sustainable development;

5. Support and promotion of environmental and development institutions, fostering of human capacity-building and firm establishment of the concept of environmental citizenship;

6. Limitation of the degradation of the environment and natural resources and exertion of efforts to manage them in a sustainable manner that ensures Arab water and food security, the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity and the control of desertification;

7. Development and integration of Arab productive sectors, application of integrated environmental management systems and clean production methods, improvement of productivity with a view to increasing the competitiveness of Arab products, strengthening of the capacity to predict industrial accidents and natural disasters and preparedness for them;

8. Promotion of the role of the private sector and civil society institutions and groups, encouragement of their participation in the establishment and implementation of sustainable development plans and strengthening of the role and status of women in society;

Second: Achieving the goals of sustainable development in the Arab world requires the formulation of Arab common action priorities, as follows:

1. Strengthening Arab cooperation and coordination with regional and international organizations and with other countries of the world, especially the Islamic countries and the Group of 77 and China, so as to have greater opportunities for negotiation at international gatherings and making efforts to gain the support of those groups for the endeavours of the Arab States towards achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Arab region and in the world in general, based on international legitimacy;

2. Implementing integrated policies for poverty reduction, primarily by facilitating adjustment to economic reform policies, raising professional qualification and general and technical education levels, creating work opportunities for nationals of Arab countries, rationalizing and making proper use of available resources, promoting social solidarity, creating practical solutions to the debt problem and strengthening the role and participation of the private sector and civil society in the formulation and implementation of sustainable development programmes;

3. Establishing an integrated population policy and remedying the demographic imbalance between country and city;

4. Enacting binding legislation; formulating, implementing and periodically assessing integrated national and regional policies; raising the awareness of all segments of society; and implementing sound development policies that take into account the distribution and limited nature of available natural resources;

5. Applying integrated water-resource management methods, developing additional water resources such as sea-water desalination and recycling of treated waste-water and limiting water wastage;

6. Establishing economic and environmental policies that take into account the conservation, development and rational exploitation of sources of non-renewable energy and the limitation of their negative effects on human beings and the environment and encouraging the utilization of renewable energy sources on sound economic and environmental bases;

7. According greater attention to human development in the Arab region by strengthening national and regional policies that deal with human health, maternal and child welfare and the care of the elderly and persons with special needs, with a view to preserving the cohesion of the family; developing educational curricula for the various levels; providing support to scientific and technical research centres; and raising levels of qualification, culture and awareness;

8. Exerting greater and more positive efforts towards achieving integration between environmental and health strategies, especially in terms of providing safe drinking water and food, treating waste-water and solid waste, controlling or limiting the potential dangers of chemicals, various types of pollution and genetically modified substances; and achieving nuclear safety in the Arab region;

9. Encouraging investment in and attracting capital to the Arab region, bearing in mind the social, economic and environmental objectives in sectoral plans, policies and programmes; fostering new opportunities for bringing about sustainable development; and limiting adverse effects on health and the environment;

10. Updating legislation and laws, promoting the Arab Free Trade Zone, developing methods for the production and marketing of Arab products to make them more competitive on international markets and protecting the rights of small and medium-sized enterprises, including industries, trades and professions, and traditional knowledge;

11. Introducing substantial improvements in infrastructures and the institutional structure and modernizing transport and communication means to facilitate the movement of persons, capital and information so as to achieve Arab integration and consolidate a genuine partnership between the private and governmental sectors;

12. Making every effort to accede to multilateral international conventions on environment so as to serve Arab interests; promoting regional cooperation in the area of environmental conservation; helping Arab countries and other developing countries to cope with the economic and social effects of international policies and programmes for correcting and compensating for

world environmental problems in such a way as not to hamper their development programmes;

Third: Achieving sustainable development within the context of globalization, the liberation of international trade and the information revolution and strengthening cooperation among peoples on the basis of dialogue and integration between civilizations requires the creation of more opportunities for developing countries and agreement on new mechanisms of good governance based on international principles and respect for the rights of peoples to sustainable development, as set out in the Rio Declaration, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, through the following:

A. World Trade Organization

World Trade Organization efforts to realize the objectives for which it was created, i.e. the opening up of markets for countries' exports, and non-use of any impediments to diminish the competitiveness of developing countries;

B. Informatics

Efforts by the international community to facilitate access to information technology and modern communication means that will help rationalize transport and the use of resources and energy and facilitate the implementation and follow-up of sustainable development policies;

C. Governance and mechanisms for developing it

1. Efforts to strengthen the role of the League of Arab States and its various organizations and ministerial councils concerned with sustainable development and to develop their operating mechanisms with a view to enabling them to adopt an integrated approach to the implementation of sustainable development strategies and programmes;

2. Development of the institutions of environmental and development action in the Arab world and support for their activities at the national and regional levels so as to contribute to the mobilization of the various sectors of society together with the relevant Government agencies, each within its own sphere of competency, in order to ensure the sound planning and regular execution of sustainable development programmes;

3. The strengthening of partnership with the institutions of civil society and the private sector in order to broaden the decision-making base with respect to sustainable development;

4. Efforts to strengthen the role of the United Nations and its various organizations concerned with sustainable development; to develop their operating mechanisms with a view to enabling them to adopt an integrated approach to the implementation of sustainable development strategies and programmes; and to call upon them to strengthen their cooperation with the League of Arab States and its institutions;

D. Financing mechanisms within the regional framework

1. Development of existing funds in Arab and Islamic States that share in the financing of sustainable development projects;

2. The according of priority, in financing at the national level, to the execution of projects for sustainable development projects and improvement of environmental conditions;

3. Emphasis on the principles of social solidarity and support for non-governmental institutions and provision of incentives to them to contribute to sustainable development;

E. Financing mechanisms within the international framework

1. Fulfilment, by the advanced countries, of the pledge called for by the United Nations and reaffirmed by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, namely, increasing official assistance to developing countries until it reaches 0.7 per cent of the gross domestic product of the advanced countries;

2. An increase in the resources of the Global Environment Facility to match the level of official assistance to developing countries, in view of the Facility's important role as a basic financing tool for environmental and development activities; the allocation of more resources to assistance in the implementation of programmes under the relevant multilateral conventions; the granting of fair and equal opportunities to all developing countries to take advantage of the Facility; and the simplification of procedures for obtaining from it financing for sustainable development projects;

3. Encouragement of foreign direct investment to boost national financial resources and of the efforts of the private sector towards sustainable development;

4. Strengthening of the link between the secretariats of international conventions on environment and national and regional specialized organizations, so as to afford more support to sustainable development programmes in developing countries;

F. Monitoring and follow-up mechanisms

1. Creation of mechanisms for the checking, monitoring, ongoing assessment and further development of sustainable development programmes until it can be ensured that they are in conformity and that they effectively achieve their objectives;

2. Elaboration of consistent sets of indicators for measuring development towards sustainability in the Arab region and performing periodic assessments with a view to directing its course.